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Bredesen Pledges AC Help For Needy *Metro Action Commission Begins Service Thursday*

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- The Metro Action Commission began handing out donated air conditioners Thursday to those who qualify.

Officials said that as of noon, they had helped 30 people and were expecting more.

Jewell Brown suffers from emphysema and said she would die if it were not for the air conditioner provided by the commission.

The commission said it has given away 400 air conditioners so far.

Residents 65 and older and people with medical problems and young children will be given preferential treatment.

Residents who receive the free air conditioners will be responsible for the electric bill. There is also assistance available for those who qualify.

Click here for more information.

The free air conditioners coincide with Gov. Phil Bredesen's announcement Wednesday that the state will dip into emergency funds to reimburse community service agencies to buy air conditioners for low-income people suffering from the heat.

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The hot weather has been cited in 13 deaths in Shelby County and one in Wilson County, and some agencies have reported running out of money for air conditioners.

"We've contacted them today to say money is no object -- if someone needs an air conditioner we have emergency funds for those purposes," Bredesen said.

Tuesday marked the 12th day of 100 degrees or above in Nashville this month, the most recorded in any month for the city. Nashville set a record of 102 on Wednesday, while Memphis matched a 2000 record of 100.

In East Tennessee, Chattanooga hit a record high of 103. Knoxville hit 99 degrees and the Tri-Cities area peaked at 95.

"We've passed beyond it being a hot, dry summer that's creating some problems, to really an extraordinary situation here in the state of Tennessee," Bredesen said.

Bredesen said all 19 community service agencies around the state have been given the directive to "do what it takes keep

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SAFETY TIPS

- Stay indoors as much as possible.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothes.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Eat small meals, more often.
- Avoid caffeinated, carbonated and alcoholic drinks.

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people safe, we will work out the details and get you reimbursed."

The heat wave that has forced some schools to hold classes for only half a day, is renewing interest in a school calendar that delays the return to classes until after Labor Day when the weather is cooler.

Legislation that would have prohibited school start dates before Aug. 25 failed two years ago, but some parents say lawmakers would have more luck now after a recent round of early school closings and canceled athletic practices in Middle Tennessee.

Tennessee has sweltered in a heat wave that began more than two weeks ago. The National Weather service has issued a heat advisory in effect from noon Wednesday to 7 p.m. CDT Thursday for much of the eastern two-thirds of the state, where high temperatures will climb above 100 degrees.

The recent scorching temperatures across the state have a nonprofit group SaveTennesseeSummers.org calling for lawmakers to delay school start dates.

"This oppressive heat we're having solidifies the fact that schools should start later," said Carol Duffin, a Clarksville mother and one of the group's co-founders. "We're trying to get our legislators to pass a law in Tennessee that will mandate the start of school for the entire state."

Despite much higher temperatures than normal, educators with Rutherford County schools favor the 180-day state-required student calendar they have in place rather than one that begins in late August or early September, spokesman James Evans said.

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"We could push back the beginning of school, but it would mean we would have to cut other breaks out or make them shorter, such as fall break, winter break and/or spring break," he said. "Many parents here like those breaks, as do students and teachers, because it gives them a much needed chance to rest at various points throughout the school year."

In Nashville, public school officials have decided to operate on a half-day schedule for the rest of the week because of the heat and failing air conditioning units. Other schools have also cut their days shorter in response to the high temperatures.

The air conditioners failed at Cheatham County Central High School on Wednesday. Students were let out before noon.

Also, there will be no school in Stewart County on Thursday because of the heat.

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